Brothers Of the Air

Story of a Heroic Deed

By RALPH BERGENGREN

I.

The new biplane had only just left the field in an effort to climb higher into the almost cloudless sky than any aviator had yet ascended. Twice it had circled the aviation course, and each long spiral had carried it a peg upward. Already the determined, insistent br-r-r of the motor was softened by distance, and fieldglasses were necessary to assure oneself that the little black figure between the canvas parallelograms was actually a human being.

The last man who had touched the biplane—one of the mechanicians who had given the apparatus its final grooming—watched its flight grimly. His face was pale under its coat of tan, and his eyes glittered with some repressed excitement. Presently when somebody touched him lightly he started nervously and pulled himself together with an effort, but he seemed unable to fix his eyes on the tall young man in plaid knickerbockers who had thus startled him.

The young man, whose cap, worn backward after the fashion of aviators, seemed to add keenness to his long, smooth shaven face, kept his hand lightly on the other's shoulder. To the distant spectators they presented nothing more startling than the spectacle of a well known air man talking rather familiarly with an unknown mechanician. Many were watching them and pointing them out to new arrivals with the explanation:

"That's Harriman, you know, away over there across the field—the fellow who made that splendid flight yesterday in the Bleriot."

Harriman's grip tightened a little on the mechanician's shoulder.

"Did you tamper with Clinton's machine before the getaway?" he asked evenly.

His voice was low. It failed to reach the group of ten or a dozen other mechanicians gathered around his own machine at a little distance. The man in the blue overalls looked at him and then away again.

"What do you mean, Mr. Harriman?" he demanded sullenly.

"Don't lie!" said the other. "I've been watching you ever since he went up." He dropped his hand from the man's shoulder. "We're rivals in this business, and if anything happens to Clinton it's none of my funeral. But I'd like to know if anything is likely to happen—understand?

"If anything happens," he continued, "I may add that there'd be a hundred dollars coming to the man who had fixed it. But it wouldn't do for him to come to me with his story after he'd had a chance to make it fit the circumstances."

He turned on his heel and moved away, whistling. The mechanician hesitated. Then he took a long step after the other man.

"I'll tell you what will happen, Mr. Harriman," he said quickly. "He'll lose his control of the elevating plane. He gave me my walking papers this morning, but I guess he won't be looking very hard for a substitute. You watch him. When he's done about a dozen of them spirals"—

He got no further. Harriman, his face illuminated with angry determination, had turned and gripped him by the wrists.

"You low brute!" he exclaimed sharply, raising his voice.

The men puttering about the monoplane heard him. They turned quickly, saw the two men struggling together and came up running. The group surrounded the aviator and his captive like a living curtain.

"Take this man and give him to the police," said Harriman. "Pick him up as if he were injured. If he makes a fuss injure him. Two of you are enough. The rest of you get my machine in order. And you, Dick, chase across the field and tell the announcer I'm going up. Tell him," he called after the retreating figure, "that I'm going up after altitude!"

The men stared. They were used to quick action, but this happened a little quicker than usual. Only one of them caught the situation.

"You're going to catch Clinton?"

"If I can. He's up there with a tampered machine, which may fail any minute. He can't be signaled, and there's no use starting a panic in the grand stand."

II.

The distant crowd of spectators wondered as it saw two men with their burden emerge from the little group, while a third ran across the field toward the announcer, and the others swung the monoplane into line for a start. There was a moment's discussion; then the announcer raised his megaphone and bellowed to the four points of the compass:

"Mis-ter Tho-mas Har-ri-man going up in the Ber-i-ot. He—will—try—to—break—the—world's—record—for—altitude!"

Harriman, firmly settled in his machine, raised his right hand. Behind him the mechanicians sprang away from the apparatus, the propeller began its steady, insistent roar, and the monoplane careered madly across the elastic turf of the field.

Among the aviators and experts on the field the knowledge of Harriman's errand had spread from man to man. It had lapped over into the press box and sent an unaccustomed thrill of excitement along the reporters' table. Anxious eyes studied the biplane to see if there was yet any sign of defective machinery. Once the machine started as if to settle earthward; then it steadied, and those who knew drew a long breath and told one another that the swerve was due to some upper air current, for the biplane was again climbing.

Although the whiz of its propeller blades was clearly visible, like a little electric fan, the sound they made was now altogether inaudible. The roar of Harriman's motor meanwhile sounded like a continuous accent of haste and anxiety.

For the monoplane was now completing its first spiral, its motor running full speed and its occupant evidently bent on gaining every possible inch of elevation. Again and again the elevating plane lifted the insect-like body to a sudden, almost perpendicular, upward flight. There was danger in thus forcing the mechanism. Each time the aviator took the risk that the repeated stress would snap some connecting link between himself and his apparatus and send it crashing downward. But to the audience each of these splendid upward leaps seemed to be executed for its amusement, and it cheered them wildly. Here and there people argued about the probable altitude, but none denied that the monoplane was rising faster than the airship that had preceded it.

Under any circumstances Harriman's monoplane was a faster machine than Clinton's biplane. The biplane was built for stability, endurance and carrying power. The monoplane was constructed for speed first and other things afterward.

Again and again it seemed as if Harriman lifted his machine upward by sheer force of will. As the faint buzz of the motor sounded once more directly above the grand stand it was evident that the dragon fly had cut one-third from the distance that separated it from the biplane. It was impossible to estimate its height above the ground, but each successive spiral, sometimes carrying the monoplane far out over the river, evidently brought the pursuer nearer the altitude of his quarry.

Fifteen minutes, twenty, twenty-five—almost half an hour had elapsed since the monoplane started. The two airships were now near together, and fieldglasses were necessary to follow their evolutions. The band had started another march, but no feet beat time to it. The field had altogether lost its customary air of bustle and preparation. The aviators had drawn together and were looking steadily upward. The mechanicians stood in idle groups watching the airships. The announcer had put down his megaphone.

Then the biplane began to drop. It fell slowly to the level of the monoplane, and for a long thirty seconds the two machines seemed to be coming down together.

One of the men at the edge of the field spoke into a telephone, and a moment later a motor driven ambulance came into view from behind the hospital tent. It stopped and waited. Inside a couple of white coated surgeons were arranging a stretcher. The chauffeur leaned forward, with his eye fixed on the biplane.

But the two airships were again mounting, now almost side by side. Even with the glasses it was impossible to tell what the men in them were doing. But the monoplane, putting on speed, headed in front of the slower craft and then turned and plunged suddenly downward.

III.

A quick indrawing of breath ran along the grand stand, a mighty sigh, as if all these thousands of people had responded to a given signal. The band stopped playing, one instrument after another involuntarily silenced by the general feeling of something imminent and terrible.

Up there in the sky Harriman seemed to be performing feats that were no longer amusing, but criminally reckless. It was one thing, people told one another, to see a man take risks, but they had not come there to see a man commit suicide. Three times in succession he drove his machine across the path of the biplane and then dived earthward at an angle that made it seem impossible that he would not be pitched bodily out. But the fourth time the other machine followed, and the two began circling back toward the earth.

And now the race seemed to be reversed. The monoplane led, and the biplane followed. The long, graceful spirals brought them nearer and nearer to the landing place. The band, as if ashamed of its lapse from duty, played louder than ever.

The faint buzzing of the motors grew to a roar as the two airships circled the course not far above the heads of the spectators. Then it stopped abruptly as first one man and then the other shut off his power and swooped to the solid earth. Clinton climbed hastily out of his machine and approached the monoplane, taking off the pads that protected his ears from the noise of his motor and hearing for the first time the thunder of applause that had greeted his landing.

"Well, Harriman," he said, "I suppose this is what you were after with all that pantomime. But what the dickens were you trying to say to me?"

"You just look over that machine of yours inch by inch," replied Harriman, climbing stiffly out of his own airship, "and I don't think you'll need to ask questions. Overhaul your elevating plane in particular. Br-r-r-r!" He slapped his arms to restore circulation. "It's a cold place up there without one's leather jacket!"

THE TRAGEDY OF SAMSON THE STRONG

Judges 13:8-16, 24, 25—Jan. 31.

Samson Born a Nazarite—His Birth Foretold—His Mission Foretold—The Value of a Mission—How He Judged Israel — Samson's Weakness — His Loyalty to God—Victory In Death.

"Beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink."—Judges 13:7.

ALL Israelites who took a certain vow were styled Nazarites. No one should confound these people with the residents of Nazareth. Jesus was a resident of Nazareth, but not a Nazarite. The Nazarite vow was that spirituous liquor in every form should be avoided, and that the hair should not be cut. Samson from birth was under this vow, which, by the direction of the angel of the Lord, was adopted for him by his parents. In some sense the vow seems to have signified complete consecration to God and His service.

Twice before Samson's birth, the angel of the Lord communicated with his parents to the intent that the mother's mind, especially, should be impressed with the importance of abstemiousness; and that her child should be born under a favorable endowment. Undoubtedly his parents realized to what extent parents may give mental and physical strength to their children, and would be on the alert to endow their offspring favorably.

The Angel Disappearing in the Flame.

According to Divine promise, Samson was to be one of Israel's Judges—Deliverers. The need of deliverance is evident from the context. The Philistines resided to the southwest of Palestine. They were a warlike people, and very intelligent as respects manufactures. Their cunning is shown in that they not only disarmed the Israelites, but prohibited their making any iron implements or doing any kind of blacksmithing work. In this manner they held the Israelites in a species of peonage, exacting tribute of them.

Samson's work for his people must not be measured by merely the amount of damage which he did to the Philistines as a warrior and as a strategist—setting fire to their wheat-fields by ingeniously using foxes for the purpose, etc. Doubtless his chief work was one of reviving the spirit of his people, who had become thoroughly hopeless under the oppression of their enemies. The lesson of what one could do when he devoted his life to delivering his people from their enemies must have been a great stimulus to patriotism and an encouragement to return to the Lord.

Points to Be Remembered.

We must not forget that the Jews were not Christians, and that the rules laid down by Jesus and the Apostles for Christians were not applicable to the Jews. According to the Scriptures Moses and the nation of Israel were a House of Servants (Hebrews 3:5, 6. They were promised Divine blessings in proportion as they served faithfully the Divine Law, which did not call upon them to be saints in the Christian sense of that word.

Another difference between the Jew and the Christian is that the former was promised temporal blessings as a reward for faithfulness, while the latter is promised spiritual blessings with temporal adversities and trials of faith, patience, love and loyalty. Unless this distinction between the two Ages and the two Laws be borne in mind, we shall continually be in difficulty.

According to the Law, Samson was rated as a very faithful servant of God. His faithfulness consisted in his loyalty to the Divine requirements and to Israel, God's covenanted people. His faith was continually manifested in all he did; and his life was used in serving his people. He is rated as an Ancient Worthy.—Heb. 11:32, 39, 40.

Samson was neither a Christian nor an example to Christians. In many respects he lived after the flesh, notwithstanding his noble self-sacrifice in the Lord's service. We should remember, however, that he was never begotten of the Holy Spirit. Only since Pentecost have any been begotten of the Spirit as "New Creatures in Christ." True, we read that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Samson; but we are to bear in mind the wide distinction between spirit-begetting and the Spirit's mechanical operation upon the Prophets and other Ancient Worthies to move them to accomplish the Divine purposes. But Christians are to receive the Spirit of Adoption.

The Boy Samson.

A woman was Samson's undoing. He confided in her, and she betrayed him. While he slept, his deceitful friend cut off his hair, and then delivered him to his enemies. They gloated over him, put his eyes out, and kept him as a slave, grinding at the mills. But at a great feast, they brought him forth as a trophy. He stood between two immense pillars, which supported the roof of the great building; and with a prayer to God, he grasped these and pulled down the entire structure, doing more damage to the Philistines in the killing of their great men, and more therefore for the deliverance of his people, in that one act than in all the other experiences of his life.